



PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA™

The desire to ensure a strong public school system should unite Albertans, not divide us.

Like us, you might be hearing from Alberta families across the province that truly accessible, publicly funded schools that provide choices are important.

The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta agrees with this statement and works diligently to ensure that is the case as we represent 27 Alberta Public School Boards, account for over 800 schools and over 250,000 students across the province.

A strong public school system is fundamental to creating a strong society and a strong economy.

To this point, it is important to recognize that Alberta Public Schools provide a foundation for exceptional learning, providing access to all Alberta students. They deliver top ranking educational outcomes such that graduates are well-prepared to enter a post secondary institution or directly join the workforce.

Through the Public School system, all Alberta students have the opportunity to achieve their very best and it is inherent upon us to ensure this continues to be the case for years to come.

The desire to ensure a strong public school system should unite Albertans not divide us.

We have heard that a need for choice takes people away from the Public School System. One might suggest that anyone placing value on the education of all Alberta students and the opportunity to strengthen the foundation of a thriving society and burgeoning economy would work to fortify the Public School system, offering choice – not tear it down.

Public Schools are the first choice school in Alberta with 64.1% attending in the 2021-2022 year.

Lack of choice is a curious notion because Public Schools offer a vast array of choices to students and families. In answer to those seeking choice:

Yes, Public Schools offer choice through academic programming, athletics and extra-curricular opportunities.

Yes, Public Schools offer alternative and enhanced learning programs, addressing the needs of students with a wide spectrum of learning styles.



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Yes, Public Schools provide equitable access to education in all regions of Alberta.

Yes, in Alberta, funding for K-12 education already follows the student.

And yes, Public Schools encourage and support parent involvement through elected parent councils. This is a key aspect to driving change and innovation at the school level.

Why the push for more Charter Schools?

Current conversations around choice often lead to Charter Schools being identified as the answer. Why do people not seek the fortification of Public Schools if seeking choice?

Did you know that Alberta is the only province in Canada that has Charter Schools? It would be interesting to understand why this is the case. When Canada ranks highly in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performance results, why would we want to emulate the US approach, where they track to a much lower PISA ranking and where the public education system is broken?

Evidence shows that the US experience promoting Charter Schools with public tax dollars has come at the expense of Public Schools. The charter school movement in the US has decimated the public school system in several states.

Alberta's Public School system must be appropriately funded in order to fully and equitably support the needs of all Alberta students.

While the recent budget announcements include a number of education-related items, Albertans have real concerns regarding the perpetual funding gap. Alberta's Public Schools remain underfunded to provide the support needed to achieve the outcomes we hope for our students. As such, we encourage the government undertake a thorough evaluation of spending on K-12 education across the ecosystem, understanding where and why the Public School system experiences a continual funding shortfall.

Consider this, in Alberta Charter schools receive 100% of the per student funding split in the same way as Public, Separate and Francophone schools and yet only account 1.4% of Alberta students. Private schools receive 70% and only account for 5.11% of Alberta students. This is despite the fact that neither are freely equitable, nor do they accept or accommodate the needs of all students seeking access – that falls only to the public school system. In fact, some selective private school programs can cost upwards of \$25,000 or more per year.

This is an important point as Albertans hear about the lower class sizes in Charter and Private schools, which is made possible because they limit enrollment, charge extra fees and they do not incur the expenses of accommodating the varying needs of all students - a luxury not afforded to public schools.



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Consider this, why has government funding increased for Charter Schools, when enrollment levels have stayed around the same percentage for enrollment rates. This is just one of many aspects that must be understood and assessed when making decisions about budget allocation and how best to meet the demands of a diverse society.

Another interesting point to consider is the disunity that Charter school administration versus student population creates. It is not cost effective. Charter Schools typically have a smaller population of students, yet they require a disproportionate amount of administrative staff making the cost per staff much higher than in Public Schools.

As leaders in Public School Education and stakeholders in Alberta's K-12 education ecosystem, we believe that a strong public school system is fundamental to creating a strong society and a strong economy. We believe that Alberta public schools and our students should not be sacrificed or disadvantaged for the benefit of a select few.

All Alberta students deserve the benefits derived from key learnings of Charter Schools

Most people don't know that Alberta Charter Schools were initially established as a short term (5 year) program to gather information on learning styles and teaching methodology. The information gathered at Alberta Charter Schools was supposed to be consolidated and flow back into Public Education. This legislative requirement, though clearly documented, has never been fulfilled by Charter Schools in Alberta.

More evaluation is needed on the learning outcomes in Charter Schools in comparison to Public Schools to analyze the cost / benefit relationship between provincial school jurisdictions as well as the benefit to all Albertans.

Albertans want to know K-12 education is being led in the right direction.

With the recent budget announcements and a flurry of activity targeting K-12 education in the province, one wonders how decisions were arrived at. Alberta families with children attending public schools that are bursting at the seams are wondering why that remains acceptable and will continue while public funds are pouring into schools that are un-accessible by the majority.

In light of this reality, we encourage the government to conduct a thorough evaluation of all legislation and regulation impacting the public school system and the larger K-12 education ecosystem – seeking transparency, equity and improved efficiencies.

By extension, Albertans expect accountability for the responsible use of public funds and for the future of our children. Albertans expect School Boards to make sound decisions, providing appropriate



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leadership and oversight in order to achieve the best student outcomes and best return for publicly funded education.

That said, Public School Boards are ultimately accountable to the citizens of Alberta as Trustees are publicly elected. The same cannot be said for Charter and Private Schools. While they receive public funds for every student, they are not accountable to those providing the funds – the taxpayer. In fact, Charter and Private Schools are not required to have a democratically elected board nor are they required to employ certified teachers or even teach the provincially approved curriculum (although some do).

How prepared are you to talk to voters about K-12 education?

While each district has its own set of challenges and opportunities, we encourage you to become more informed and engaged to ensure students in your region, and across the province, receive the best possible Public School Education. I invite you to reach out to your local Public School Board and meet directly with the community leaders who are guiding K-12 education for your region.